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RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI 0833
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RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU 0554
RUEHGO/AMEMBASSY RANGOON 0414
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC
RUEIDN/DNI WASHINGTON DC
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SUBJECT: EIGHT PEOPLE KILLED IN RECENT VIOLENCE IN ASSAM

¶1. Since March 12, the Northeast Indian state of Assam has seen a recent spate of violence with eight insurgency-related deaths.

On March 12, four people were killed and four injured when police opened fire on a crowd in the town of Bengtol in the Chirang district. According to police, more than 2,000 locals confronted security personnel who arrived to tear down a camp set up by the militant group, the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB). The NDFB, fighting for an independent Bodo homeland, has had a ceasefire with GOI since 2005 and is supposed to remain in designated camps. The Bengtol camp is not designated for NDFB occupation. The police claim to have tried to pacify the crowd by agreeing to put the operation on hold, but the protestors apparently turned violent and began setting fire to property and attacking police, prompting the police to open fire.

¶2. NDFB cadres have reportedly clashed over past weeks with supporters of the former Bodo Liberation Tigers (BLT), a rival Bodo militant group that was disbanded following an agreement with the GOI in 2003. Former BLT militants joined the mainstream political process with some becoming state legislators and others are now part of the Bodoland Territorial Council that administers Bodo areas in Assam. The BLT's rival, NDFB, feels excluded, and is upset that the GOI has not proceeded with peace negotiations despite the ceasefire. Also, the NDFB is an old ally of Other Select Terrorist Organization (OSTO) United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA). (Note: Both groups were attacked by Bhutanese and Indian forces in Bhutan in ¶2003. NDFB was greatly weakened, leading to the ceasefire. End Note.) The police were apparently trying to help the assimilated BLT by dismantling rival NDFB's camp in an undesignated area.

¶3. In a separate incident on the night of March 15, four persons died and 54 others were injured when suspected ULFA militants set off a grenade at a festive gathering of the Mising tribe in Jonai in the state's northeastern Dhemaji district. Dhemaji Deputy Commissioner D. Mishra said the powerful blast occurred near the government Circuit House, injuring four police constables. Police believe ULFA were the perpetrators as the attack coincided with ULFA's "Army Day" on March 16. ULFA, however, issued a statement denying its involvement in the explosion and alleged that it was the handiwork of "forces" out to defame ULFA and trigger inter-communal conflicts in Assam.

JARDINE